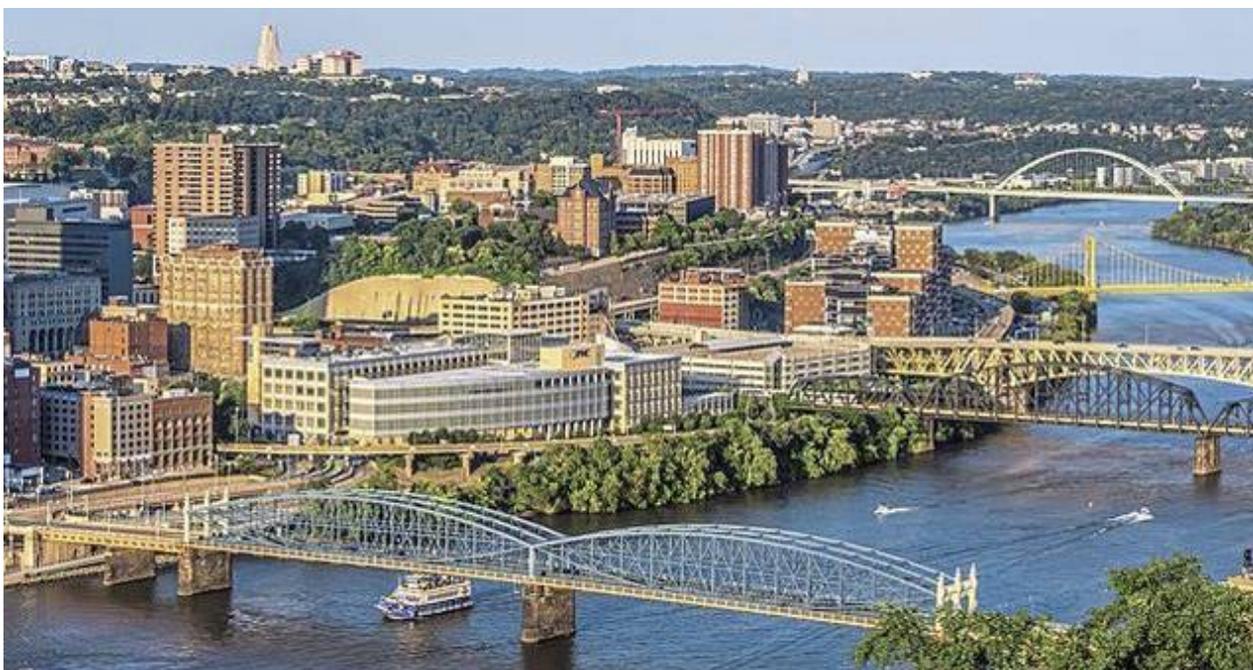


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Alicia Harvey-Smith: Changing workforce, Act 76 place focus on career education

TRIB LIVE ALICIA HARVEY-SMITH | Sunday, December 1, 2019 12:00 a.m.



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With deep roots in steel and manufacturing, Pennsylvania is well known as the state that built America. Towering skyscrapers and sprawling infrastructure are Pennsylvania's long-standing calling card to our nation.

Today, with the emergence of advanced manufacturing, robotics, automation and other tech-driven sectors, Pennsylvania is again well poised to drive a new economy. Our abundant resources, top-tier education and work ethic have focused the attention of global industries on our state.

The emergence of a new, tech-enabled economy in Pennsylvania is a reemergence of the state as a global leader, and has created an immediate demand for a skilled workforce to grow and sustain these industries. Employers in the state are voicing a need for a workforce with skills and specialized training to operate and maintain the systems needed to conduct business in Pennsylvania.

To address this immediate need, on Oct. 30, Gov. Tom Wolf signed House Bill 265 (Act 76) of 2019. The act establishes provisions that support career and technical education — as well as workforce development in Pennsylvania. It is intended to cultivate educational opportunities for students in Pennsylvania while emphasizing the importance of career and technical education in fulfilling workforce readiness.

The act sets forth a path for more flexible and relevant career education that is responsive to the workforce needs of our state with a special focus on partnerships and apprenticeships. This initiative places specific focus on career-focused educational institutions.

To keep up with accelerating demand for job-ready, middle-skilled graduates, Pittsburgh Technical College recently launched a national engagement initiative to build a national pipeline to attract, educate and retain job-ready graduates who are prepared to make an immediate workforce impact.

Students in middle-skill programs are in high demand — often recruited by employers before graduation. As a result, last year, more than 96% of available PTC graduates were placed in their fields of study. This high placement rate is rooted in close partnerships with traditional and emerging regional employers to form curricula built around top-tier simulations, technology and agile, career-focused skills training. Before graduation, student training is subjected to real-world application through apprenticeship-like internships.

Through deep partnerships with businesses and industries, that work to shape our curricula, PTC secures internships for all on-campus, degree-seeking students that enables them to spend their last quarter in an internship or clinical rotation.

This formula has proved successful for PTC and our graduates. However, to keep Pennsylvania nationally, and globally, competitive, it is important to expand initiatives with employers to further align curricula with emerging needs and ensure job-ready talent is available here, in Pennsylvania.

The Pennsylvania Center for Advanced Manufacturing Careers estimates that employers in the state will need up to 17,000 additional skilled workers during the next decade. To ensure the sustainability of tech-enabled industries in Pennsylvania, we must provide clear pathways to bridge the gap between career and technical education and workforce development in Pennsylvania.

PTC supports the governor and elected officials who have joined together to pass Act 76. PTC pledges to work with educational institutions statewide to address the changing needs of an emerging economy, and we call upon employers to seek new partnerships with educational institutions like PTC. Through our collective work, we can again position Pennsylvania to advance our state and our nation.

Alicia Harvey-Smith, Ph.D., is president and CEO of Pittsburgh Technical College, Oakdale.

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